

Marshall University College of Science
Policy No. COS-Fac-10
Instructor Responsibilities for Class Time Reduction or
Cancellation, and Alternate Instruction

October 13, 2025

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 Purpose

This policy sets expectations for faculty attendance, class cancellation, significant time reduction, and alternate instruction in the College of Science. It protects instructional quality and ensures students receive the instruction for which they are entitled. This policy builds on [Marshall University Policy AA-16, Professional Responsibility, Academic Responsibility, and Academic Freedom](#), specifically § 3.1 (b), which requires faculty to meet classes except when circumstances prevent. See also Faculty Senate Resolution 24-25-30, *BAPC: Best Practices for Class Session Modification and Cancellation* ([page 21 of the linked document](#)).

Instructors are expected to meet all scheduled class sessions as published in the official academic calendar and course schedule. Regular class meetings are a foundational component of high-quality instruction and student success. Routine substitution of scheduled class time in face-to-face or scheduled online classes with independent work, asynchronous content, or take-home assignments is not an acceptable substitute for live instruction and should occur only under exceptional circumstances with prior approval.

Frequent cancellation or shortening of classes shows a disrespect for students who have enrolled in classes with scheduled meeting times. Instructors are reminded that attending class sessions can impose real costs on students, including lost wages, arrangements for childcare, and travel burdens. Further, this indicates that time in class is not important to the instructor. When an instructor appears disengaged, students may understandably question why they should remain engaged themselves. Instructors are encouraged to treat student time with respect and to preserve a predictable and professionally delivered class schedule.

1.2 Scope

The policy applies to all instructional staff—full-time tenure-track or non-tenure-track, part-time, adjunct, and teaching assistants serving as instructor of record—who teach credit-bearing courses in any modality (lecture, laboratory, seminar, hybrid, or online).

2. Instructor Responsibilities

2.1 Meeting Classes

2.1.1 Faculty are expected to conduct every class session at the published time, place, and modality. Regular attendance at all scheduled class sessions is a fundamental faculty responsibility and part of the instructor's contractual obligation.

2.1.2 Faculty must start and end each scheduled session on time. Habitual late starts, early dismissals, or other reductions in class time violate this policy.

2.1.3 Repeated or excessive cancellations, delays, or early dismissals, regardless of cause, compromise instructional quality and student engagement and are not acceptable. Faculty members are expected to minimize disruptions to scheduled sessions and maintain consistent instructional presence throughout the term.

2.1.4 The federal definition of a credit hour (34 C.F.R. § 600.2) requires "one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks." This standard is widely used by accreditors and institutions to set local credit-hour and contact-time policies. Class cancellations or frequently starting late or dismissing early can cause a course to fall below this threshold. Instructors must ensure the required direct faculty instruction minutes are delivered each term.

2.1.5 Fully asynchronous online courses do not have live meetings and therefore cannot be "canceled" in the usual sense. However, in this and all other modalities of instruction, instructors must provide all promised instructional materials, activities, and assessments on the timeline stated in the syllabus and must be available for advertised virtual or in-person office hours. Repeated failure to do so is a breach of instructional responsibility subject to this policy.

2.1.6 Faculty may not change the advertised modality of a course without prior Chair and Dean approval.

2.2 Circumstances Permitting Class Cancellation or Modality Change

2.2.1 Unforeseen Emergencies and Illness: Instructors may cancel or shorten a class when sudden illness, injury, or another personal emergency makes it impossible to teach. Notification to the Department Chair must occur as soon as practicable, and an alternate-instruction plan should follow when the instructor is able to communicate.

2.2.2 Approved Professional Obligations: Occasional absences for approved professional duties—such as presenting at a scholarly conference, chairing an accreditation visit, or fulfilling assigned University service—are permissible when (a) the instructor has obtained prior Chair approval and (b) a substitute, make-up meeting, or equivalent activity is arranged. Travel purely for convenience, vacation, or extended holidays does not qualify. Note that faculty who are traveling still have an obligation to be available as possible to both students and colleagues who are covering their classes. The travel request submitted to the Chair should list a reliable method of contact for the duration of the trip.

2.2.3 Religious Observances and Civic Duties: Absence for the observance of a recognized religious holy day, required jury duty, or verified military reserve obligation is allowed. Faculty should provide advance notice to the Chair and arrange alternate instruction.

2.2.4 Inclement Weather, Facilities Disruptions, and University Emergencies: When the University announces a weather-related closure or delay under Policy UPGA-2, a temporary switch to synchronous online delivery is automatically approved. Instructors are encouraged, when practicable, meet their class remotely at the normally scheduled time or provide another equivalent instructional activity.

Occasional on-campus disruptions such as heating or cooling failure, flooding, power outages, audiovisual failure in large lecture spaces, or fire alarms may also force cancellation or curtail class time. When such facility problems arise, instructors should make reasonable attempts to relocate or continue remotely. If that is not feasible, the class may be canceled.

If the University is open but local weather conditions prevent an instructor from reaching campus, the instructor should not cancel the class outright. Instead, the instructor must arrange a remote session, secure an approved substitute, or provide another form of alternate instruction, and must complete all departmental notifications specified in Section 3.

2.2.5 Frequency and Duration Limits: At most one cancellation of substantial time reduction per term (defined as more than ten minutes of a fifty-minute class or a comparable fraction of a longer session) may be excused each term with Chair approval and provided that contact-hour requirements remain satisfied. Any additional loss of class time—whether cancellation, late

start, or early dismissal—must be replaced through a rescheduled session, approved substitute, or equivalent instructional activity. Repeated late starts or early dismissals count as substantial time reductions under this limit.

2.2.6 Once-Weekly Versus Multiple-Meeting Courses: For courses that meet once per week, any missed or substantially shortened session must be rescheduled or otherwise replaced. For courses meeting two or more times per week, the allowance in 2.2.5 applies; beyond that, every canceled or materially shortened session requires an approved make-up plan.

2.2.7 Extended or Long-Term Absences: An absence expected to exceed one calendar week or multiple consecutive class meetings triggers the need for a formal continuity plan. For conference travel of a week or less, the instructor is normally expected to arrange a short-term substitute or alternate instruction. For longer or medically related absences or those requiring HR leave (e.g., FMLA), the Chair in consultation with the Dean arranges a longer-term substitute and addresses compensation.

2.2.8 Temporary Modality Changes: Temporary changes to the delivery mode of a scheduled class session, for example, moving an in-person class to Teams, require Chair approval when the change is not related to University closures, weather events, or facilities disruptions covered in Sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.5.

Dean approval is required only when the change extends beyond one calendar week, affects more than two consecutive class sessions, or otherwise results in a significant alteration of the course's delivery mode for the semester.

Instructors who have received prior Chair approval for professional travel under Section 2.2.2 may arrange appropriate alternate instruction, including synchronous or asynchronous online activities, without additional Dean approval provided the change is limited to a short-term absence (normally no more than one week) and course learning outcomes and contact-hour requirements remain satisfied.

Students must receive clear advance notice once approval is granted.

2.2.9 Unacceptable Reasons for Cancellation or Time Reduction: Classes may not be canceled, shortened, or moved online for reasons of convenience, low expected attendance (e.g., adjacent to holidays), personal travel unrelated to University duties, routine medical appointments, or informal study time for students. Such actions violate the instructional responsibility outlined in Section 2.1 and Policy AA-16.

2.2.10 Exceptions to Standard Meeting Duration: Courses that conclude with a quiz, examination, laboratory experiment, or other comparable culminating activity are exempt from the expectation of a full-length session. In such cases, students are permitted to exit once they have completed the activity, and early dismissal does not require an approved make-up plan.

2.2.11 Exceptions to Reporting for Course Cancellation: Certain courses, such as departmental seminars, senior seminar / capstone courses, specialized offerings, or courses with scheduled field or off-campus activities, may meet only at designated times, which may not include all published class days. In addition, weather-dependent field experiences (for example, in geology, ecology, or related disciplines) may require postponement or rescheduling even when the University is open. Such instances are not considered cancellations and do not require reporting, provided the overall instructional time and credit-hour requirements are preserved within the term.

3. Notification and Communication

3.1 Department Notification

3.1.1 Planned absences – Faculty must notify the Department Chair (or program head) as soon as they know an absence, early dismissal, or delay will occur. For non-emergency events such as conference travel or scheduled medical appointments, the request should be made in writing in advance—ideally before the start of the term or immediately upon learning of the conflict. The request must include the reason for the absence, the dates affected, and a brief summary of the alternate-instruction plan (substitute, make-up date, online activity, etc.). Chair approval is required before the class may be canceled, shortened, or moved online.

3.1.2 Emergency absences – When sudden illness, injury, family emergency, or severe travel disruption prevent an instructor from reaching class, the instructor (or a designee) must contact the Chair or departmental office as soon as possible, preferably immediately and before the class start time. Telephone, text message, or other rapid means are acceptable. The message should provide: (a) course number and section, (b) time and location of the class, and (c) any preliminary instructions for students (for example, “check Blackboard for an assignment”). The online absence form should be completed once the instructor is able to communicate more fully.

3.1.3 Late arrival – If an instructor anticipates arriving late, they should alert the department so students can be advised whether to wait. Students are generally told to wait at least ten minutes for a fifty-minute class unless informed otherwise.

3.2 Student Notification

3.2.1 Students must be informed promptly of any cancellation, time reduction, or modality change. The primary channels are a course-wide email sent via the University system and an announcement in Blackboard. When possible, notice should be sent early enough to prevent unnecessary travel to campus.

3.2.2 If the instructor is incapacitated and cannot send a notice, the Chair or departmental staff will notify students using University email. Chairs typically do not have direct access to an instructor’s Blackboard shell, so the notice may be limited to email unless another faculty member can post the Blackboard announcement. The syllabus must instruct students to monitor University email and Blackboard for cancellation alerts.

3.2.3 Classroom signage: For same-day changes in on-campus courses, the department will place a standardized sign on the classroom door stating that the class is canceled or moved and directing students to check Blackboard for instructions.

3.2.4 Alternate-instruction details: The notification must include (or reference) the approved alternate-instruction plan: substitute instructor name, make-up date, web-conference link, or assignment location. Full explanation of acceptable alternatives is provided in Section 4.

3.3 Documentation and Electronic Absence Form

3.3.1 The department maintains an electronic Class Cancellation Log. Instructors complete an online absence form that feeds directly into this log whenever a class session is canceled, shortened, rescheduled, or moved online. The form records the date, course, reason, and proposed alternate-instruction plan and routes the information automatically to the Chair.

3.3.2 For emergencies when immediate online access is impractical, instructors may notify the Chair by telephone, text, or email. The electronic form must be submitted as soon as circumstances permit so the record is complete.

3.3.3 Chairs review the log each term to identify patterns of concern and to verify that contact-hour requirements have been met. Log data may be referenced in annual evaluations or in response to student complaints.

3.3.4 The Chair must alert the Dean in writing when a faculty member records more than one unmade-up cancellation or shows a pattern of significant time reductions in a single term. The notification should summarize the incidents and the corrective steps requested of the instructor.

3.4 Notification During University Closure or Facilities Disruption

When Policy UPGA-2 announces a weather closure or delay, or when on-campus facilities disruptions (such as power outages, heating or cooling failures, or similar events) prevent class from meeting as scheduled, no absence form is required. Faculty are encouraged to communicate promptly with students through Blackboard or University email regarding the class cancellation and, when practicable, to provide clear directions for accessing a planned remote session or equivalent activity.

4. Alternate Instruction for Missed Class Meetings

4.1 Guiding Principle

When a scheduled class session cannot be held in its published format, the instructor must provide an alternate learning experience that supplies comparable contact time and advances the expected learning outcomes. Cancelling a class without providing comparable instructional time conflicts with this policy, is inconsistent with the federal definition of a credit hour, and may also violate accreditor requirements.

4.2 Planned Absence Options

4.2.1 Rescheduled meeting – hold the session at another mutually acceptable time **only if every enrolled student agrees** and approved by the Chair. Rescheduling is expected to be rare as it is likely impractical for most classes.

4.2.2 Approved substitute instructor – arrange a qualified colleague, or guest speaker to teach the planned material. The assigning instructor must supply lesson plans and resources. Brief substitute coverage is considered professional courtesy. Significant recurring coverage requires Chair review of workload or compensation.

4.2.3 Synchronous remote session – conduct the meeting live through a University-supported platform at the scheduled time. Provide a recording or equivalent activity for students who cannot connect.

4.2.4 Structured field or off-campus activity – lead a pre-approved field experience, common exam, or institutional testing session that maps to course objectives.

4.2.5 Asynchronous module – post a recorded lecture, narrated slides, or interactive module in Blackboard with clear instructions and deadlines. Asynchronous substitution is allowed only when identified in the syllabus or approved by the Chair in advance.

4.3 Emergency Absence Options

4.3.1 Rapid substitute – with Chair assistance, enlist any available qualified instructor to supervise the session using provided materials.

4.3.2 Impromptu assignment – direct students through Blackboard or email to complete readings, problems, or online activities that occupy the scheduled class time. Follow up promptly with feedback or integration into the next class.

4.3.3 Deferred make-up – if no immediate activity is possible, schedule a make-up session or extend future meetings to restore lost contact minutes, with Chair approval. Rescheduling or extended meetings are expected to be rare as it is likely impractical for most classes. Communicate the make-up plan to students within two business days.

4.4 Limits on Independent Work

Assigning readings, problem sets, or take-home exams without interactive or instructor-led components is not an adequate routine substitute for live instruction. Independent work may serve as an alternate only when it is part of the approved course design or paired with instructor engagement such as feedback, discussion, or assessment.

4.5 Chair Approval and Communication

All alternate-instruction plans for planned absences require Chair approval beforehand. Emergency substitutes or assignments must be reported to the Chair as soon as feasible. Students must receive clear written directions in Blackboard or University email explaining the alternate activity, its objectives, and any deliverables.

4.6 Reciprocity in Substitute Teaching

Faculty who request a colleague to serve as a substitute should be ready to offer equivalent assistance when asked. Chairs may weigh past reciprocity when approving future substitute requests.

4.7 Record of Alternate Instruction

The online absence form (Section 3.3) must note the alternate method used and confirm that contact hours are preserved.

5. Oversight and Remedies in Cases of Noncompliance

5.1 Monitoring and Early Intervention

The Department Chair reviews the submissions regarding cancellations throughout the term and tracks student feedback, classroom visits, and syllabus audits to identify instructors who cancel, shorten, or shift class meetings without notification or adequate replacement. When a potential issue is detected, the Chair meets with the faculty member to clarify expectations and, if needed, requests a written plan to prevent future losses of instructional time.

5.2 Written Improvement Plan

If an instructor records more than one unmade-up cancellation or shows a pattern of significant time reductions in a single term, the Chair requires a written improvement plan. The plan must describe concrete steps the instructor will take to meet instructional obligations, address any missed contact hours, and communicate changes to students. The Chair reviews progress at mid-semester and end-of-semester checkpoints.

5.3 Escalation to the Dean

When a faculty member does not follow the improvement plan or when the pattern of noncompliance is severe, the Chair notifies the Dean in writing with a summary of incidents and corrective actions attempted. The Dean may impose heightened oversight, such as requiring prior approval for any non-emergency class changes or more frequent reporting on instructional activities.

5.4 Impact on Evaluation and Personnel Decisions

Documented noncompliance is placed in the faculty member's personnel file and referenced in the annual evaluation. Persistent failure to meet classes or provide alternate instruction can influence merit pay, reappointment, tenure, or promotion decisions. Severe or willful neglect of instructional duties may trigger disciplinary action under University faculty conduct procedures, including letters of reprimand or unsatisfactory performance ratings.

5.5 Remediation and Training

The Dean or Chair may require the instructor to complete teaching-development workshops or mentoring designed to improve course management and student communication. Unsuccessful completion of remediation may be considered in future evaluations.

5.6 Student Complaints

Students who believe an instructor is frequently absent or reducing class time without suitable replacement are encouraged to submit a written complaint through normal university mechanisms. The Chair will investigate, and corrective action is taken if warranted.